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WORLD
CHRISTIAN
BOOKS 17

LIVING
" **WITH THE**
GOSPEL

by DANIEL T. NILES

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ABOUT WORLD CHRISTIAN BOOKS

TODAY it is not enough to believe; it is necessary also to understand. From every part of the world comes the demand for books that will help the Christian to understand his faith, to find the answers to the questions that he and other men are asking, and to know how to present the faith to others. The series WORLD CHRISTIAN BOOKS is planned to help in this particular area of Christian need. The books are directed in the first place to the "younger churches," but the old distinction between younger and older churches no longer really holds. All churches are faced by the same problems. In all countries the same questions are being asked. The series is specially planned for those who are called to preach and teach, in the hope that the materials given in these books may help them to carry out their task more effectively. But the aim has also been to write so simply that ordinary members of the church who wish to study their faith may be able to use these books as individuals or in study groups and so to grow in knowledge and understanding.

The books are being published first in English, but it is intended that as soon as possible they should be made available in the main languages of the Christian world. Writers have been chosen from various countries and various branches of the church, with special emphasis on the younger churches. This means that there will be a variety of voices, but the aim and the hope is that through many minds and many tongues the faith of the church in its one Lord may be clearly set forth.

STEPHEN NEILL
General Editor

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Introduction

THE WRITER'S PURPOSE in this book is to dwell on the story and meaning of the life of Jesus. The story of Jesus is the center of the biblical record, and to live with this story is what the Bible demands.

What is attempted in this book is not a life of Jesus—the gospel material does not furnish us with all that is necessary to write such a life. The Gospels deliberately set out to *preach* his life and, therefore, right through the record the meaning is intertwined with the event, interpretation with history. This aim dominates even the order of arrangement of material in the Gospels.

Neither does this book attempt an explanation of the life of Jesus from the standpoint of Jesus himself. We must carefully avoid the temptation to write of Jesus in terms of psychological analysis. The gospel writers make sure that the story is so told that the object of judgment in the story is not Jesus, about whom the story is told, but the listener on whose behalf the story is enacted. We do not judge Jesus; it is always he who judges us.

The manner in which the story of Jesus is told in the Gospels leaves that story firmly resting on the faith and

witness of the church. In retelling the story there are, therefore, two courses open: either to tell the story in language that has meaning only for those who believe, or to transpose the story into the idiom of common speech and contemporary thought. In this book, however, a middle course is adopted; the style is mainly that of everyday speech—yet the writer believes it is never quite possible to transpose the story of Jesus out of the idiom in which the Gospels tell that story, since common speech is rooted in normal human experience, whereas the story of Jesus is unlike any other story, just as Jesus himself is unlike any other man who has ever lived. Indeed, the gospel writers never seem to be troubled by the question as to whether what they record is understandable in terms of normal human behavior or experience; their one desire is to carry conviction that Jesus is Savior.

A reader of the gospel record, therefore, must bring himself to live with that record, until Jesus meets him there and challenges him to believe. When they crucified Jesus, the cross bore the inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Those who crucified him did not mean this sincerely; but he himself put his own meaning into their words. So it always is. The meaning of our lives is the meaning he assigns to them. We crucify him, and then accept that it was for us that he was crucified.

Jesus, Master carpenter of Nazareth, who on the Cross through wood and nails has wrought man's full salvation, wield well Thy tools on us, that we who come to Thee rough-hewn may by Thy Hand be fashioned to a truer beauty; for Thy Name's sake. Amen.

Chapter 1

The Beginning of the Gospel

THE GOSPEL of Jesus Christ is not simply a story remembered; it is a message proclaimed. It is NEWS, and an essential part of this news is the act of proclamation itself. That there is a messenger to announce the news is itself part of the news; for the news is that God has reached out to man in order to save him from his sins and all their consequences. The messenger is part of God's reaching out toward men. Jesus Christ has reached out and found someone to send to someone else with the message of his redeeming love. Paul expresses this truth in a telling phrase when he speaks of himself as "set apart for the gospel" (Rom. 1:1). The word he uses literally means "to mark off by boundaries." The gospel has become for Paul the boundary of his life. He lives within it, he lives by it, he has no interests outside it. The gospel is a reality, living and at work today—a deed of long ago, yet always active; and made active anew today by the proclamation of those who belong to it. It is a message with a given meaning for the hearer.

The gospel records partake of this nature of proclamation. This can be seen in the way in which they are composed; they all select from the material that was available

and arrange it in a special way; their method of presentation is dramatic. Let us look at some examples of this. Mark's Gospel has sixteen chapters. The first eight chapters lead up to Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, the next two chapters describe the journey to Jerusalem, and the last six chapters deal with the last week of Jesus' life in the flesh. In other words, the Gospel is not a biography; it gives far more space to one short period than it had given to another much longer period. Or look at the dramatic placing of events that we find in the Gospels. Luke places the story of the healing of the ten lepers at the beginning of the last journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (Luke 17:11-19). It is appropriate there, for it is the story of nine Jews who were healed but did not return to give thanks to God. John includes in his account of the life of Jesus only seven miracles,* but the seven are so chosen and so arranged that they carry forward the main narrative and set out the main theme:

The turning of water into wine (2:1-11)

Our new creation is in Christ.

The healing of the nobleman's son (4:46-54)

Faith only is required to make this gift one's own.

The healing of the impotent man (5:2-9)

This new creation means the restoration of lost powers.

The feeding of the five thousand (6:4-13)

From Jesus we receive our strength and sustenance.

The walking on the water (6:16-21)

By Him we are encouraged and kept secure.

The healing of the man born blind (9:1-7)

Through Him we receive light and vision.

The raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)

Until, at the last, life is crowned with life eternal.

* An eighth in Chapter 21, but this comes after the resurrection.

Is it any wonder that John says, “These are written that you may believe” (John 20:31)? The gospel story is like a whirlpool. It sucks you in. That is the purpose for which it was written.

The Drama Opens: The Perspective Set

The gospel drama opens with a prologue in which three affirmations are made: (1) Jesus is the deed of God, God himself active in the life of men. (2) This new deed is continuous with the drama of Israel, set forth in the Old Testament. (3) In Jesus the end event has arrived; Jesus is God’s last word to men.

The birth stories of Matthew and Luke, as well as the opening paragraphs of John, make clear that it is God whose action the Gospels celebrate. “God so loved.” “God was in Christ.” “God commends his love.” Jesus is not the sacrifice that man offers to appease an angry God; he is God’s own sacrifice offered to redeem rebellious man.

In the Old Testament, the central ritual of sacrifice is set out as the offering of blood, and “blood” was to the Jew the symbol of life. It was “life” that he offered to God when he made his sacrifice, and not death; the victim of the sacrifice was his representative, doing something on his behalf, and not his substitute doing something so that he need not do it (Lev. 17:11). The Hindu sacrifice, on the contrary, is a sacrifice of death; the anger of the god which would destroy the sinner falls on a substitute, and the anger is turned away. Jesus is in the line of the Jewish sacrifices. He is man’s representative. Man pleads before God the blood of Jesus—that is, the life of Jesus—as his sacrifice; and he finds pardon by partaking in that life. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin, for it is victorious life, life free from sin; and, participating in it, we too find victory and freedom. It is God who

opened this way to man. It is God who thus made his own life available to be shared by man. Jesus is God's action; "God so loved . . . that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16).

But this action of God was not something entirely new; it followed naturally upon all his previous activity. He had always and from the beginning been concerned with man. Man had always and from the beginning been under the pressure of God's advancing reign. And now, in Jesus, that which had been a blockade became an invasion. God arrived in person on the human scene. It was to this continuity of God's action that Israel was witness, for Israel was the chosen instrument of God's redeeming activity. God had said to Abraham, "I will bless you . . . so that you will be a blessing . . . in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3, R.S.V. note). And when Israel was in exile in Babylon and sought to learn from God the meaning of his sorrow and suffering, the prophet had answered that the time will still come when all families of the earth will be blessed because of Israel, when they will say of him, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; . . . upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:4-5). The gospel is continuous with the drama of Israel; Jesus is the fulfillment of the responsibility that God had laid upon Israel to be the instrument of his salvation. It is this truth which is underlined in the gospel narratives by the story of John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, and in the genealogical table in the first chapter of Matthew. Matthew's Gospel begins with these words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

But Jesus is more than the son of Abraham. As Luke sets forth in the genealogical table which he gives, Jesus is the son of Adam. It is the whole story of man that finds

meaning in the coming of Jesus, for in Jesus was laid the foundation on which the whole of creation was to be built up into that perfection for which God made it. In Jesus the ending of all things was begun. This is the theme of the songs of Mary, of Zechariah, and of Simeon. God has acted, and our eyes have seen his salvation (Luke 1:49, 68; 2:30).

The first words of Mark's Gospel are, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Here is news, but it is news of a beginning. A beginning of what?

A beginning of God dwelling with man; He who was counted as one of us on the day that the Roman census was made; God counted among men.

A beginning of the final conflict between God and evil, of which Herod's attempt to kill the Christ child was no more than the first sign.

A beginning of the gathering together of the whole family of God, of which the gathering at Bethlehem was the first promise—a gathering in which there were Jews and Gentiles, the wise and the unlearned, the rich and the poor, men and beasts, earth and heaven:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen." (Rev. 7:9-12)

The Hidden Years: His Growing Thoughts

We must pass on from the beginnings of the story of Jesus to an account of his public ministry; but, in passing, we will pause for a while to look at him during those thirty hidden years of which the Gospels tell us so little. There is only one incident in the gospel story which belongs to this period, but it is one which sheds a great deal of light upon the growing thoughts of Jesus during this time.

Jesus is twelve years of age; he has completed his formal education in the village synagogue school, and according to the usual custom is taken to Jerusalem, perhaps to be received along with other boys of the same age as a "son of the law," as a grown-up member of the Jewish congregation. What impression did that first journey to Jerusalem make on the boy Jesus? There would be the exaltation of spirit, resulting from the singing of the Psalms as the caravans moved on to the city of the great king, and from the shout of joy that would go up as Jerusalem was sighted.

There must have been also long and painful thoughts along the way as the pilgrims passed the crosses planted along the roadside, on which those men had hung who only eighteen months earlier had partaken in a revolt against Rome under the leadership of a man called Judas. (A second census had taken place under Quirinius at that time, and was the occasion of an unsuccessful revolt in Galilee which was cruelly suppressed; the crucifixion of those who had taken part in it was spread over two to three years. A Roman census meant for the Jew fresh taxation and further evidence of the servitude of his nation.)

As for the impression which the city itself and the temple made on Jesus, we can only guess what his thoughts

were as he listened to the teaching of the rabbis when he was taken before them, and as he watched for the first time the goings on in the temple market.

But even in this early incident in the life of Jesus can be seen the beginnings of that consuming sorrow for his people which later cried out over Jerusalem, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!" (Luke 19:42); that inner certainty which made him teach "as one who had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22); and that holy indignation which burst forth when he drove out from the temple those who bought and those who sold (John 2:13-22).

In John's Gospel the clearing of the temple market is the first incident in the ministry of Jesus; surely it is of significance that this is so, for it is as though some fire had been smoldering in his soul for a long time and broke out in scorching flame at the first opportunity. "My Father's house," he cried out, "shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. But you have made it a house of trade and a den of robbers" (see John 2:16; Mark 11:17).

"My Father's house"—there is the announcement of who he is; "for all the nations"—there is the declaration of whom he is for; "But you"—there is the challenge flung out. You have turned the court of the Gentiles in the temple into a market. You have made religion a means of worldly gain. You have arranged that man shall be exploited in the name of the service of God.

Man—that was the central point of all Jesus' concern. Man and all men—it was to them that his whole life was committed. He had come that not one man should be lost, but that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). But how was this to be done? The Gospels tell us that Jesus wrestled with

this question for forty days in the wilderness before he began his public ministry.

At the age of thirty, he left his home in Nazareth and came down to Judea to receive, at the hands of John the Baptist, the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. He who had no sin took his place in the rank of sinners. It was right in the eyes of God that this should be so, and Jesus must fulfill God's righteousness. It was in answer to this obedience that, when he was baptized, God said to him, "Thou art my beloved Son" (Mark 1:11).

That was the mission and the commission of Jesus—"to be God's Son amidst the perplexities of daily life." The prophets of the Old Testament received from God a message to be delivered; their task was to *speak*. The calling of Jesus was to show in his life what it means to be the Son of God; his task was to *be*; to *be* the Son of God living among men. In the case of the prophets, their message was greater than they; in the case of Jesus, he himself was the message.

But what did it mean to be the Son? What did it mean for him, what did it mean for others?

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.' " And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours." And Jesus answered him, "It is written,

'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written,

*‘He will give his angels charge of you,
to guard you,’*

and

*‘On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”*

And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:3–13)

Could being the Son mean comfort and a comfortable life? Bread, and with bread everything that is necessary for the life of the body? No, for man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Bread is given to make it possible to live the life of sonship. Bread is given for the journey which God has commanded. Manna is provided for the pilgrimage of the people of God. No; sonship can never be a means to comfortable living, for man is more than body and life is more than comfort.

Could, then, sonship mean a life specially protected by miracle and sustained by excitement, a life of waving flags and shouting slogans? No; for we are tempting the goodness of God if we first get thoroughly worked up about some cause, and then expect God to be on our side. The kingdom of God is like a lump of leaven which a woman hid in three measures of meal. It does not come with observation. Sonship gives us no special claim on the power of God, and the pilgrim must be prepared for the routine

drudgery of his daily march. Man is more than mind, and life is more than adventure.

But man is also spirit; could sonship, then, mean for man power and the way to power? The devil said to Jesus, "Worship me." The only way to power as power is to bend the knee to it, to make it the goal of one's all-absorbing quest. But power to order the lives of our fellows never provides us with the means of winning their allegiance to God. Man can only be loved into God's kingdom; he cannot be organized into it. The pilgrim must reach the promised land on his own feet.

The way of Jesus in his dealing with man cuts across all human ways. The Communists promise bread; Jesus promises the Word of God. Dictators and demagogues of all kinds promise processions and crusading enthusiasms; Jesus promises the quietness of faith. The democracies of the world promise the maintenance of human rights; Jesus promises the maintenance of God's sovereignty. The frontier of decision to which Jesus pushes every man is a frontier created by God's promises and by his demands; no human cause is identical with his cause.

Chapter 2

Are You the Christ?

Jesus and Men: Challenge and Opposition

SOMETHING has happened. Man is being claimed as belonging to the kingdom of heaven. And this kingdom has come, has come within reach. Repentance is the only way to meet the claims of this kingdom, for it demands of every man and of every group of men a change of direction with respect to their lives. A brief study of the various groups of men whom we encounter in the gospel story and of their attitude to the work of Jesus will help us to see what his demand for repentance really involved, and how man reacted to it in his goodness as well as in his badness.

Six groups of people are mentioned in the Gospels as having contrived together to reject and destroy Jesus. They are: the Romans, the Sadducees, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Zealots.

The Romans were the guardians of law and order. They had established peace and orderly government in the then known world. They had stamped out or brought under control all the petty kingdoms in which the life of the common people was no more than the plaything of rulers

who cared only for themselves. They were stern, but they had done much good to their subjects. Jesus Christ thrust on them a choice between truth and policy, between doing right and maintaining peace. Pilate, preferring policy to truth, washed his hands, and delivered Jesus over to be crucified.

The Sadducees were the guardians of worship. It was their responsibility to maintain the temple and the observance of the temple ritual. When Jesus said, "Destroy this temple" (John 2:19), he was challenging the very reason for which the Sadducees existed. Moreover, the Sadducees were the local group which wielded power under the Romans. They represented whatever measure of self-government the Jews possessed. When Caiaphas said, "It is better that one man should die rather than that the whole nation should perish" (see John 11:50), he was putting into words the bitter choice which Jesus was forcing them to make. Jesus was revolutionary both in religion and in politics, while the Sadducees were committed to, indeed were responsible for, preserving things as they were. They preserved themselves at the cost of handing Jesus over to the Romans to be killed.

The scribes were the guardians of orthodoxy. They had been engaged for generations in building up "the tradition," which constituted the official explanation of the law. The law had been given to the Jews by God, and to be a Jew meant to seek to be obedient to the law. It was the function of the scribes to lay down in detail what this obedience involved in terms of daily living and of the common problems of life. They brought the law within the reach of the understanding and obedience of ordinary men. We may remember how Paul speaks of himself as blameless according to the law (Phil. 3:6). But Jesus swept aside the tradition of the elders, and restored the

law to its true function as speaking to man about man as God intends and desires him to be. The scribes were afraid of Jesus because they feared that through his teaching their law would be in danger.

The Pharisees were the nationalists of the day. Their one dream was the restoration of the Jewish nation to freedom, and their one concern was the most careful preservation of every detail of Jewish practice in matters of religion and worship. Jesus seemed to them to be both irreverent and dangerous. The Romans had ordered that any Roman soldier could compel any Jew on the road to carry his pack for him one mile. Jesus said, "If this should happen to you, go not one mile, but two" (see Matt. 5:41). It made the Pharisees' blood boil to hear such nonsense. The Pharisees had made the observance of the sabbath the symbol of the keeping of the whole law. Jesus attacked this symbol—not the sabbath, but the way in which the Pharisees taught men to keep it—in a way which made the Pharisees hate him. To the Pharisees, Jesus was an enemy of the nation.

The Herodians and the Zealots were the exact opposite of one another. The followers of Herod were the running-dogs of Rome. Their attitude to all things was one of not interfering, and letting things go on their own way. They were cunning in their cynical unconcern. Jesus nailed them to history with one word when he said of Herod, "Go and tell that fox" (Luke 13:32). The Zealots, on the other hand, were those who desired and sought to provoke or encourage an armed uprising against Rome. Barabbas was a Zealot, and Judas Iscariot also seems to have been sympathetic to the Zealot cause. The Herodians found that Jesus had a much clearer and more definite purpose than suited their idea of gently letting things go on as they were. The Zealots knew exactly what

they wanted—an armed revolt; they could not understand why Jesus was so slow and hesitant. Jesus was too intense for the Herodians, and too obtuse for the Zealots. Both were glad to get rid of him.

And then, added to all these, there was the scandal of Jesus' attitude to those men who were outside the pale of society. He befriended sinners, the common folk who were so slack about their religious practices; he associated with publicans, the tax collectors who were willing to work with the Roman government; he visited the Samaritans who for centuries had been the enemies of the Jews; and he included in his mission the Gentiles who were outside God's covenant with Abraham. Every known landmark was in danger because of Jesus.

Of course, it was true that Pilate had an unrepented past which tied his hands; that Caiaphas was concerned with his gain in the temple market and his position under Rome, and this confused his motives; that the scribes and the Pharisees were desirous to maintain their reputation for holiness, and that this desire dulled their vision; that Herod had lost his moral sense through his own cunning; and that the Zealots had lost their capacity to love through the singleness of their devotion to their cause. All this was true; but Jesus was crucified not only because of all this evil but also because, as we have seen, this evil was able to press into its service so much good. It was men in their devotion to good causes who crucified Jesus Christ; men in their common concern, expressing itself in different forms, for peace and for order, for religion and for freedom. Evil has little power in itself. It becomes powerful only when it is able to use what is good for its own purposes. That is why repentance, for us men, is such a difficult demand to meet; goodness and badness are so mixed up in us that it is not sufficient to repent for

the bad; we have to recognize that even that in us which we consider good may have come under the power of evil.

The Initial Phase: The Central Question Posed

We have already seen that Jesus' demand for repentance was first expressed in his act of clearing the temple market. But, in order to see this incident in its true context, we must remember that at this time the work of Jesus was still being conducted within the framework of the ministry of the Baptist. It was harvesttime in Judea when the Baptist appeared on the bank of the river Jordan, clothed in a hairy garment—the usual garb of a prophet since the days of Elijah—and demanding repentance from the people, for God's harvesttime had come. "God's agent has arrived," John cries out; and "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12).

Jesus joins John in this ministry of calling the people to repentance, and some of the disciples of John attach themselves to Jesus.

The story breaks at this point to give us a glimpse of Jesus at a wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12). He and his disciples had been invited and they had gone. As it turned out, his presence there made all the difference to the wedding celebration. This incident is also noteworthy for its revelation of Mary's understanding of her Son. Jesus went after the wedding to Capernaum where his mother lived, and spent time with her before he returned again to Judea. Did Jesus set out on his life's mission with a mother's blessing? We shall never know how much and to what extent. But both as his ministry opens and as it closes, it is his mother who is with him.

When Jesus returned from Capernaum it was the time

of the Passover, the memorial of God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. When Jesus cleared the temple market, he stood forth as the deliverer of his people. John had given his challenge in the wilderness; Jesus brought that challenge to the very heart of the temple. The worship of God had been imprisoned under the bad traditions of men; Jesus set God's people free to worship in the way that God himself had intended.

This is perhaps the best place to say a word about gospel chronology. We shall follow in the main the chronology of John's Gospel, on the principle that where it differs from the earlier Gospels, the changes have been deliberately made. John sets the ministry of Jesus within a framework of four Passover feasts. He begins his ministry with the cleansing of the temple at the first Passover, after which follows his main Galilean ministry. The second year of his ministry begins with a controversy occasioned by the healing of the man at the pool of Bethzatha during the second Passover (John 5 simply says, "a feast of the Jews"). This controversy continues throughout the year, which finally ends in gathering gloom. The third year begins with the feeding of the five thousand which took place on the eastern shore of the lake of Galilee, the five thousand being mostly pilgrims who were on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. During this third year Jesus spends most of his time with his disciples. The year comes to an end at the fourth Passover; it is on that Passover day that Jesus is crucified as our paschal lamb.

Some scholars have sought to identify the original setting of each gem of the gospel story, and to prize these gems loose from their present setting in the Gospels. They hold that the Gospels do not give us any clear indication as to the order in which things happened in the life of Jesus. Others in various ways have tried to reconstruct from the gospel records an intelligible account of the

sequence of events during the ministry of Jesus. We can learn much from both these methods of study. But our attempt here will be simply to follow the drama of Jesus as the Gospels portray it, and, without too much attention to the accuracy of chronological or historical detail, to look at Jesus as he meets us in the records.

Who is Jesus? That is the question in which the gospel story involves us, and it is significant that the story constantly keeps this question in the foreground. On almost every page of the gospel narrative we find the attempt of someone to answer this question. John the Baptist points to Jesus and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). A voice comes from heaven which says, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17). Nicodemus speaks to Jesus and says, "We know that you are a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). The Samaritan woman goes to her people and says, "Come, see. . . . Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). The demon-possessed man shouts out the words, "I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). Against this stream of constant witnessing, the Gospels present Jesus as keeping the secret about himself. He does not say who he is, not to any one. But the secret comes out when, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the question directly of his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15-16). We recall the joy that welled up in the heart and voice of Jesus at the answer of Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). But even after this incident the secret is still kept; for Jesus does not reveal to anyone publicly who he is; he speaks only to his own disciples. The secret is publicly revealed, and the announcement openly made that he is the Messiah of God, only when he stands bound and captive

before the high priest and facing the prospect of the cross. "Are you the Christ?" the high priest said; to which the answer came back like a pistol shot, "I am" (Mark 14:61-62; cf. Exod. 3:14). He who claims to be the Christ claims it at the very moment when he is at man's mercy, so that man is in a position to accept or reject that claim in freedom. Man's faith, uninfluenced by miracle, must make the discovery of who Jesus is and accept him.

The initial phase of Jesus' work, as part of the ministry of John the Baptist, ends very quickly. He finds himself misunderstood by the disciples of John, who imagine him to be a rival; when he discovers this, he closes down his work in Judea and departs for Galilee. Two incidents during this period must be noted: the coming of Nicodemus, who appears again in the gospel story to receive with Joseph of Arimathea the dead body of Jesus (John 3:1-15); and the conversation of Jesus with the woman of Samaria (John 4:1-42). In Galilee too, when Jesus returns, there is the incident of the healing of the nobleman's son, perhaps the son of Chuza, Herod's steward, whose wife is later mentioned as a disciple of Jesus (John 4:43-54; Luke 8:3). If this identification is correct, it would explain Herod's unfortunate interest in Jesus, which we shall consider later.

The story breaks off at this point, with the disciples of Jesus back in their own homes and at their usual trades, and with Jesus himself back at home in Capernaum with his mother.

Here we leave Jesus for a time, until we meet him again hurrying along the shore of the sea of Galilee recalling his disciples. News had come that Herod had cast John the Baptist into prison; but before the people could be dismayed by the shock of this event, they were caught

and held by Jesus. He came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14–15).

Chapter 3

The Son of God Has Come

AMONG THE Protestant girls' boarding schools in Asia, the school at Uduvil in Ceylon is one of the oldest, if not the oldest of all. It was founded in 1821. But when the American missionaries who founded it first attempted girls' education in Ceylon, they always met with the same answer: "It is not our custom." With great difficulty three daughters of Christian parents were gathered together, but the Hindus still kept completely aloof. At last two Hindu girls began to attend as day girls, but they refused to eat anything in the school for fear of losing caste. One night a violent storm prevented their going home, and one of them was persuaded to partake of some supper. The other would eat nothing. Some weeks later, the father of the girl who had eaten on the premises brought her back and handed her over to the missionary. His daughter had lost caste; therefore, the missionary must now accept responsibility for her and also later find her a husband. The missionary was willing to do so. Thus began the growth of confidence among the people in the missionary as a person who was willing to look after their

children altogether. Today the Uduvil Girls' School in Ceylon is one of the leading schools in the island.

A violent storm—that was the circumstance which Jesus used to break open a closed situation. One little girl—but it was the beginning of a growing ministry of power. The Son of God had come. That is how the Son of God always comes. There is meekness in his coming, which troubles us because it is so different from the way in which we expect him to come.

When he first came the world could offer him only a stable. And yet he came. He so emptied himself that he could enter into a little space (Phil. 2:7). But once arrived, he sought dominion over all. Of no one is the old fable of the Arab and the camel more true than it is of Jesus. The camel asked permission just to put his head inside the tent; but soon the camel was in the tent and the Arab was outside it. It is this combination of the meekness of his coming with the exclusiveness of his demands which provides the key to the ministry of Jesus. He loves, but he will not compromise. He seeks assent, but he will neither accept a refusal nor force an acceptance.

The Kingdom Is Announced: Hopeful Beginnings

The ministry of Jesus in Galilee opens with the declaration that God's kingdom has come, and it proceeds to demonstrate the fact of this coming. For what is the kingdom of God but the sovereignty of God in effective conflict with evil? In Jesus the new age had dawned, and the powers of the new age were at work. The prince of this world was dethroned (John 12:31). The strong man of the house was bound and despoiled (Mark 3:27).

In Mark's Gospel the announcement of the kingdom is followed by five miracles set in a series:

service he heals a man possessed with an unclean spirit. He then goes with Peter to Peter's home for his midday meal. In Peter's home he finds Peter's mother-in-law ill and heals her. Then there is a period of rest until the evening. But as soon as the sabbath is over, which is at about six o'clock (since the Jews counted days from sunset to sunset), Jesus goes out to the sick who have collected around the house and heals them. Then there is the evening meal, and sleep. And then early in the morning, long before dawn, Jesus gets up and goes out to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:21-38).

The events of a weekday which Matthew gives us are as follows: Jesus is in the house of a friend. He is teaching there and crowds gather to listen to him. In the midst of his teaching a paralytic is brought to him and is cured. This leads to a discussion with the scribes. Jesus leaves his friend's house a little before noon. He meets Matthew at the receipt of custom and calls him to be his disciple. Matthew follows and takes Jesus to his home for the midday meal. Matthew's friends are also collected and there is a feast. The Pharisees who hear about this feast raise questions about his dining with publicans, and Jesus engages in controversy with them. As Jesus leaves Matthew's house, two blind men and a dumb man follow him, and he cures them all (Matt. 9:1-34).

There is a breathless haste about these days and their doings, a haste that marks the whole ministry of Jesus. It is not that in his ministry there was no repose, but it was the repose of One who was always ready for every demand made upon him. He must finish the work which had been given him to do (John 17:4).

This period in the ministry of Jesus was the period of great hope. The crowds listened to him with interest, and some followed him with enthusiasm. All were captivated by the beauty and splendor of the dawning day. But soon

it was noon, and the springing plants began to wilt under the noonday heat.

The Church Disapproves: The Gathering Storm

The trouble began at Jerusalem. Jesus had gone there for the feast (John 5:1-18). He had healed on the sabbath day at the pool of Bethzatha a man afflicted with illness for thirty-eight years, and had bidden him go home, carrying his pallet-bed with him. The result was a controversy about the sabbath. Why should Jesus break the sabbath when he could have easily cured this man on the next day? After all, the man had been ill for thirty-eight years, and one extra day would have done him no harm. The reply of Jesus to this accusation of the Jews was to ask why a man should not work on the sabbath. As for their answer that the sabbath was a memorial of the fact that God rested on the seventh day, they must know that God's rest did not mean that God had ceased from working. "My Father is working still, and I am working," says Jesus (John 5:17).

The significance of the controversy about the sabbath which runs through the gospel story lies here—that it is a controversy about the nature of God. To those for whom the sabbath was the central symbol of their religious devotion, God was almost exclusively in the past tense. He *had* spoken, he *had* acted, he *had* revealed what man must do in response; man's religious duty lay simply in doing it. But Jesus was speaking of a Father in the present tense, at work still, whose demand of men was fellowship and co-operation in what he was continuing to do. It is all too easy to stone the prophet, and refuse to have anything to do with a new word—God in the present tense; and then, long centuries afterward, to make the teaching of that same prophet the ground for rejecting the prophet who comes after him with another new word.

from God. Religion tied to the past tense is a menace. In reality the weekly sabbath, as the New Testament teaches us, looks not back toward the past, but forward toward the future; it is a promise of the sabbath that is to be, when all God's work shall have been accomplished. It points forward to that day on which we shall receive our inheritance, when God shall have brought his creation to its destined fulfillment (Heb. 4:9).

This conflict of Jesus with the leaders of his people did not stop at Jerusalem; it followed him on his return to Galilee, and soon the complexion of his ministry there was changed. The crowds who had followed him became onlookers of a growing strife.

Jesus touched a leper; having himself become unclean from the Jewish point of view, he was therefore obliged to keep away from the town (Mark 1:45). He forgave sins, making himself equal with God (Mark 2:7). He ate with publicans and sinners, thus failing to keep up the dignity which a religious teacher ought to maintain (Mark 2:16). He defended his disciples when they did not observe the set fasts (Mark 2:19). He broke the sabbath, thus setting at nought the law which God had given through Moses (Mark 2:24). Thus the rumors spread, until things came to a head one day when those who had been sent from Jerusalem to spy on Jesus found a man with a withered hand and brought him on the sabbath day into the synagogue where Jesus was to preach. They made him sit where Jesus would certainly see him. And Jesus did. "Come here," he said to the man with the withered hand; and looking round with anger at those who had sought to trap him, he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." The man stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him (Mark 3:1-6).

It is important that we understand the full range of the conflict between Jesus and different groups, among the Jews, in order that we may trace what the issues were which led to the final tragedy. We can analyze the situation as follows:

The conflict of Jesus with his people was on four levels.

First of all, there was his conflict with the chief authorities of the Jewish Church. He had challenged the authority of the high priest by clearing the temple market. He had challenged the authority of the scribes by setting aside the "tradition of the elders"—the explanations of the law which had been given by learned men. He had challenged the authority of the popular leaders of religion, the Pharisees, by breaking the sabbath rules. No wonder that they all challenged him to state his credentials. "By what authority do you do these things?" Do you have any certificate from any reputed rabbi? Is it not true that you have had no systematic training in theology? (Mark 11:28; John 2:18; 7:15).

There should be no surprise for us in this attempt on the part of those in authority to find out what the credentials of Jesus were. That was their business. It was precisely for this purpose that they held responsibility. Let me give a fairly close parallel from modern times. When Sadhu Sundar Singh first came to Ceylon, his arrival was preceded by that of a book in which he had made reference to a Christian saint in the Himalayas, whom he claimed to have met and who was reputed to be more than three hundred years old. The whole thing sounded fantastic. The Sadhu himself claimed to have had many miraculous deliverances in the course of his ministry. The leaders of the church in Ceylon were skeptical about the whole business. The result was that when the Sadhu came to Ceylon, the Bishop of the Anglican Church and the Chairman of the Methodist Church both issued instruc-

tions to their people not to attend the Sadhu's meetings. They were not sure about his credentials.

The answer of Jesus to this question about his authority can be summarized in his own words when he said, "You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God." "The wind blows where it wills" (Matt. 22:29; John 3:8); if you were in touch with God, you would at once know that it is with his authority that I speak; you would not have to ask any questions on the subject.

The second area of conflict in which Jesus found himself was that of his relations with the ordinary church members. The high authorities of the church were worried about his credentials; the members of the church were worried about his commonness. "He eats with publicans and sinners" was their complaint. The answer of Jesus was that this was not really true. He did not eat with publicans as such; he ate with Matthew and his friends, with Zacchaeus and his family. He did not consort with sinners as sinners. He just befriended this particular woman who was caught in adultery, and that particular woman who anointed his feet, and that particular man whose sin had paralyzed his body. It is we, men, who think of people as types. They are colored and we are white; they are Jews and we are Arabs; they are men and we are women; they are Roman Catholics and we are Protestants. Jesus thought of people as persons. In him and for him there was no Jew or Gentile, Greek or barbarian, man or woman. There are no more types, but only persons, and each one a child of God. "He also is a son of Abraham," was Jesus' word about Zacchaeus (Luke 19:9). Perhaps it was because the scribes and Pharisees insisted on belonging to types, instead of trying to be real persons, that they could not hear the voice of Jesus and that he could do so little with them.

The third group with which Jesus was in conflict consisted of the Pharisees, the lay leaders of the church. These were concerned with the attitude of Jesus to the sabbath in particular, and to the whole law in general. Jesus was breaking the yoke which they had set upon men, and was asking men to take upon themselves another yoke, the yoke of the Son. "Take my yoke upon you," he had announced, "for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29-30).

And lastly there was the dispute of Jesus with the scribes who were concerned with orthodoxy. "You have heard that it was said to the men of old . . . but I say to you . . ." (Matt. 5:21-22). These words of Jesus, so often repeated, must have sent a cold shiver down the spine of every scribe. They saw the labor of generations of scribes vanish on the impact of those words.

The Sadducees defending the temple; the people defending their respectability; the Pharisees defending the law; the scribes defending the tradition—all were ranged against Jesus, and Jesus was ranged against them.

How would it end?

Chapter 4

A Sower Went Out

Jesus Replies: The New Community

QUITE EARLY in the second year of Jesus' ministry the situation had reached a point of complete confusion. The crowd disputed hotly among themselves. Some said that he was a good man, while others said that he was misleading the people (John 7:12). All were, in one way or another, charmed by his grace, amazed by his power, struck by his authority, perplexed by his reticence, offended by his commonness, and doubtful about his claims. Into this situation the leaders spread abroad a more or less official answer to Jesus. They announced that whatever authority and power Jesus had was of the devil (Matt. 12:24), that he was really only an impostor without any credentials (John 9:29), and that in any case he was lowborn and uneducated (John 7:15). We know this man, they said; he is a carpenter and the son of a carpenter; we also know his mother and his sisters (Mark 6:3), and we hardly need to add that we were not born of fornication (John 8:41).

The reply of Jesus to this attitude of the leaders of his people was a striking one. Here is how the Gospel re-

cords it: "But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. In these days he went out into the hills to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve" (Luke 6:11-13). The significance of that number "twelve" could not have been lost either on the friends or on the enemies of Jesus. Here was the nucleus of the new Ecclesia (Church), the new chosen people. The vineyard was being handed over to new husbandmen (Matt. 21: 41). But Jesus not only constituted the new Israel; he also announced its charter. As Matthew gives us the incident, he went up the hill and sat down; his disciples came up to him and he opened his lips and began to teach them:

It is not all who will find the coming of the kingdom a blessed experience.

It will be blessed to those who are poor in spirit;

for it is only those who accept the fact that they have nothing to offer God, in payment for his favor, who will be willing to receive his favor free.

It will be blessed to those who mourn;

for it is only those who find life's empty spaces saddening who will be willing to let them be filled by God himself, when God's gifts are not available.

It will be blessed to the meek;

for it is only those who walk humbly who know how to inherit life's experiences and make them their own.

It will be blessed to those who hunger and thirst;

for it is only those whose spirits are healthy who have the appetite for God.

It will be blessed to the merciful;

for it is only those who show mercy who have the capacity to receive God's mercy, though it is freely given.

It will be blessed to the pure in heart;

for it is only those who are single-eyed who can see God's face.

It will be blessed to the peacemakers;

for it is only those who make peace that find the peace of God which belongs to God's sons.

It will be blessed to those persecuted for righteousness' sake;

for it is only those who have made the choice, on which there is no going back, who will accept with joy the reign of God. (Matt. 5:1-10)

Luke adds to the record of this double event two other features as belonging to the reply of Jesus to his rejection by his people. He tells us that Jesus changed his mode of public teaching, speaking hereafter largely in the form of parables; and that he also undertook and carried on an active ministry through the cities and villages of Galilee. In Luke's words:

He went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. (Luke 8:1-3)

Here is a first picture of the Christian Church in action, with the women in the very center of the picture.

But what was the purpose of Jesus in adopting this method of teaching through parables? He himself gives the answer to his disciples when he says, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they

may not see, and hearing they may not understand" (Luke 8:10). The disciples had found fault with their Master, for, as they said, he had up to this time spoken plainly but now was speaking in parables; his answer to them was that since he was seeking the response of faith among his listeners, he must state the truth in a form which faith alone could grasp. To understand him, "eyes and ears" were not enough. A parable is a story in which the listener is invited to be as it were an actor, in which he almost unconsciously takes sides; and even those who could not understand would not easily forget a parable, so that it could go on speaking to them until at last they were able to understand it. It is well to remember that the miracles of Jesus too had this quality about them. He was certainly moved by pity and compassion to perform the miracles; but they were not merely deeds of compassion. They were signs of the kingdom which he proclaimed, and faith was necessary to read the signs. Speaking to the crowd whom he had fed miraculously, Jesus said, "You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves" (John 6:26). You benefited by the miracle but you never saw what the miracle signified.

If it seems as though Jesus was sometimes almost unwilling to use his gift of healing, this is because of the immense importance he laid on people's understanding the meaning of the mighty works as signs of the kingdom. To look at but one instance, we remember how, when he was staying in Peter's home, Jesus rose a great while before day and went out to a lonely place to pray. And when Peter, finding that he had gone out, came seeking him and found him, he refused to go back. He had healed many the previous evening, but many more had come throughout the night and were now searching for him. The answer of Jesus to Peter was, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also" (Mark 1:

38). The healing of the sick is part of the proclamation of the kingdom. It is not intended as a simple ministry of relief. To refer again to Sadhu Sundar Singh, he refused to use his healing gift except under special circumstances, for he said it turned people's minds and desires away from the main thing with which he was concerned, the preaching of the gospel. People must be helped to receive God together with his gifts; only so will they be in a position to receive him when he offers himself alone, and comes without any of the gifts for which we so much long.

Also, in the parables with which Jesus addressed them as he went through their cities and villages, he warned people that at any moment they might be called to make a decision. A forgiven debtor is suddenly hauled into court because he had not forgiven another who was indebted to him. A steward who had permitted long delays in the repayment of debts is suddenly called upon to render his accounts. The crisis of decision comes without warning.

Trying to Keep Jesus Quiet

When the enemies of Jesus saw that they had failed in drawing the crowds away from Jesus, and in frightening Jesus himself, they tried a second method of keeping him quiet. Jesus seemed to them to be every day more sure of his purpose and more careless of consequences; while the crowd was less willing to disbelieve in Jesus, having become ever more deeply impressed by the kind of miracles which he had lately performed. He had raised from the dead a young man who was being taken for burial, the son of a widow at Nain (Luke 7:11-17); and he had ordered the cure of a common servant of a Roman centurion, a Gentile, even without going to the house where that servant was (Luke 7:1-10). The crowds saw in

Jesus a breadth and a power of love which it was not easy to deny. In this situation, where they were losing their initiative, what the enemies of Jesus did was to go to the brothers of Jesus. The brothers were already alarmed by Jesus' growing unpopularity, and it is possible also that they were suffering in their business because of the hostility of the leaders of the people to their Brother. The Pharisees and scribes and Herodians now come to them and say, "How is it that you are keeping quiet? Can't you see that Jesus is getting himself into trouble and will get you into trouble too? What he needs is a complete rest and a complete break from work. He is overworking himself, and he has lost his balance." This is an imaginary account of the conversation. What we know for certain is that the brothers of Jesus (John 7:3) went, taking Mary also with them, to where Jesus was. They found him in the midst of a crowd and sent for him; but Jesus would not come to meet them. He sent them a significant reply, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:46-50). No family loyalty can draw him away from the work that God has given him to do.

The last and final attempt of the enemies of Jesus was to win him over with a show of favor. They had him invited to dinner by one of the important men of the place. The Pharisee Simon, a gem merchant, agreed to be host; but, while he was willing to invite Jesus as his guest, he was not willing to accord him all the courtesy which was a guest's by right. He gave him no water to wash his feet; he gave him neither the kiss of welcome nor the oil of anointing; and he seated him at the foot of the table near the door, and not next to the host where the honored

guest should sit. We know what happened at that meal. The woman who had been a sinner did for Jesus all that Simon had left undone and more; the direct words of Jesus to Simon followed: "I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47).

The Galilean ministry of Jesus now draws swiftly to its close; but one more incident must be recorded before the end. It is the incident of the message to Jesus of John the Baptist: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" We know the answer of Jesus to John:

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me. (Luke 7:22-23)

The Galilean ministry now ends, and from now on Jesus no more conducts a public ministry in Galilee. He had worked here for a year and a half. The ministry had begun in great hope; it was closing amidst great conflict. And the last picture we see of Jesus, as he leaves the shores of Galilee, is the picture of him sitting in a boat in a bay of the sea of Galilee speaking to the crowd. He was telling them some stories of harvest. A man sowed the seed, and then he did nothing more than sleep and wake and eat, and eat and sleep and wake; but the seed was living seed, it grew of itself—first the blade, then the ear, then the corn in the ear. The word of God is never wasted (Mark 4:26-29). There was another man who sowed wheat, and behold in his field grew up not merely wheat but tares. Should the tares be pulled up? No. Let them grow together until the harvest, and then the wheat will be gathered and the tares burnt. Evil flourishes only for a time. Judgment will soon overtake it. Nor can it prevent

the good from coming to its harvest (Matt. 13:24-30). But there is no harvest without waste of some of the seed that is sown. A sower went forth to sow and, as he sowed, some of the seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds of the air carried them away. Some seeds fell on rocky ground. They grew, but the plants soon withered under the heat of the sun. Some seeds fell among thorns, and though they grew, the thorns too grew and choked them. But some seeds fell on good ground, and these yielded a good harvest, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold. So the ministry of Jesus has its disappointments as well as its successes. The Pharisees may not listen; the crowd may be superficial; even so faithful a servant as John the Baptist may doubt; the brothers of Jesus may be frightened; but the seed has been sown, and harvesttime will surely come (Mark 4:3-20).

So the day ends, and, as the crowds disperse talking excitedly among themselves about the meaning of his stories, Jesus himself lies down in the boat and goes to sleep. He is tired, body and soul: and the disciples row him across the lake. "They took him . . . as he was" is the comment of the gospel writer (Mark 4:36).

The Mission of the Twelve: The Shadows Lengthen

The second part of the second year of Jesus' public ministry was mainly occupied with the training of the disciples. They must be prepared for the decisive struggle that lay ahead. The sequence of events is fairly clear. On the way across the lake a storm arises; but Jesus awakes from his sleep, and shows himself to be master of wind and wave. Not only is the storm stilled but the faith of the disciples is steadied.

On the eastern side of the lake, in the land of Gadara, Jesus meets and cures a demoniac. This man desires to

follow Jesus, but is told to go home and tell the news of what God has done for him (Mark 5:19). Jesus himself, however, had to leave the place because the people begged him to do so. They had lost their pigs, and were afraid of other losses which they might have to suffer because of Jesus. So Jesus comes once more to the Galilean side of the lake. Here he is called upon to heal the daughter of Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue. The daughter dies before Jesus can come to her. But Jesus comes, nevertheless, and raises her from the dead. To Peter, James, and John this must have been a turning point in their experience.

Then comes Jesus' visit to Nazareth, his home town. He has come to say good-by. But his townsmen are so angered by his teaching that they attempt to throw him down the hill and kill him. Jesus, perceiving their intention, turns round and faces them; and they fall apart, allowing him to go away unharmed. There was that in the face of Jesus which they could not withstand. The rejection of Jesus by the people of Nazareth is the final end of the Galilean story, and the lament of Jesus over the Galilean towns expresses his sorrow that this story should have ended thus:

Woe to you, Chorazin! woe to you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sack-cloth and ashes. But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. (Matt. 11:21-23)

Suddenly, like thunder across the darkened sky, came the news that John the Baptist had been beheaded. It was

the sign of the shadow of the cross. From this time Jesus began to speak to his disciples about the suffering that was bound to come upon him, and to teach them that they too must be prepared to face persecution. "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27).

But the only way of helping his disciples to learn what the coming of the kingdom meant was to send them out as its messengers and witnesses. He called them together, therefore, and sent them out two by two, saying, "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. . . . But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6-8). But why only to the Jews? Because the coming of the kingdom had a special meaning for them that it could not yet have for other nations. They had been called to be a blessing to all nations: and when, because of their faithlessness, they had become a people in exile in Babylon, the prophet who was their pastor there had prophesied that the time will yet come when Israel shall have so borne its sufferings that through these very sufferings the peoples of the earth will find blessing (Isa. 53). That moment of fulfillment, when Israel was being invited to fulfill its mission to the world, had come. This invitation to share the suffering of the Messiah is an invitation which can be given to the house of Israel only.

The disciples go to carry out the commission of Jesus, and Jesus himself retires across the lake to spend time in quiet with his Father. The disciples return to him after a very successful tour. Jesus takes them and withdraws apart to rest awhile (Mark 6:31). A crowd, many of them on their way to the Passover, find Jesus here on the eastern side of the lake, where he is with his disciples. They gather around him, and he teaches them. Soon it is evening, and they have had nothing to eat the whole day.

Jesus himself feeds them, using a few loaves and fishes which a lad among them had brought. The crowd go wild with excitement because of what Jesus had done. Even the disciples were excited. They were already full of the enthusiasm caused by their experiences on the mission from which they had just returned. So they and the crowd together suddenly surge around Jesus and ask him to be their king (John 6:15).

When Jesus had been tempted in the wilderness, at the very outset of his ministry, and had rejected every suggestion of the devil, the gospel record says, "The devil departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). He came back now with just the same temptations. Bread, excitement, compromise. The answer of Jesus was decisive. He refused the crown; he sent back the crowd; he hurried his disciples into a boat and ordered them across the lake, while he himself went away alone to pray.

We meet Jesus again after this, walking on the water to his disciples. It is a perfect picture of the moment at which his ministry had arrived—a howling wind, a raging sea, a moonless night, a group of frightened men in a tossing boat, weary of rowing—and Jesus master of wind and of wave. Peter says to Jesus, "Lord . . . bid me come to you on the water." And Jesus says, "Come." Peter steps out, sinks for a moment, and yet is saved (Matt. 14:25-33).

There is always that call to obedience, which comes in different forms to different people, and which leads us into that situation where we must either sink and be lost, or be held by Jesus and be saved. There is no third possibility. It is into such a situation that we must ask Jesus first to lead us. "Bid me come to you on the water." That is the situation for faith. It is only out of such a situation

that the cry is born, "Help, Lord, or I perish." Faith becomes possible only when it becomes that absolutely necessary thing, without which we shall be lost.

Master, bid us too to come to thee on the water.

Chapter 5

The Children's Bread

THE FORM OF ADDRESS which Jesus most commonly used when speaking to his disciples was "Children." "Children, have you caught anything?" "Children, have you anything to eat?" (see John 21:5). "Little children, yet a little while I am with you" (John 13:33). It was to these children of his that from now on Jesus devoted almost the whole of his time. The cross was not very far off, and he must prepare both himself and his children for the final conflict.

The final break between Jesus and his enemies occurred soon after his return to the Galilean side of the lake from the feeding of the five thousand. Crowds came to him at Gennesaret, and he healed many. But soon the Pharisees came and stirred up the crowd against him once more. It was a fickle crowd that did not know its own mind. How truly John's Gospel remarks at the very outset of the record that Jesus would not trust himself to man, because he knew what was in man (John 2:24-25).

But the greater sin was not the sin of the crowd who were not able to understand, but the sin of the religious leaders of the people who had decided to call evil good

and good evil. There could be no forgiveness for them as long as they persisted in sinning against the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God has overtaken you, says Jesus. It has invaded your territory and is right in the midst of you, but none are so blind as those who will not see (see Matt. 12:28; Mark 3:29-30).

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men. . . . Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law. . . . You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. . . . Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs. . . . (Matt. 23:13-36)

It was the final break. Even the disciples were terrified by the vehemence of Jesus and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended?" (Matt. 15:12).

The Third Year: Both Sides Prepare for the Conflict

In the gospel records not much is said about the planning and plotting which the enemies of Jesus carried on as they prepared the means for getting rid of him. All that we know is that such planning and plotting went on. There was the desire to have Jesus waylaid and killed quietly (John 7:1). There was the attempt to have witnesses ready to accuse him if he was ever brought to trial (John 8:6). There was all the discussion among themselves that was necessary to ensure that such different and rival groups as the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Herodians should act together (Mark 3:6). There was the need to get the Sanhedrin, some of the members of

which had been friendly to Jesus, convinced that it was essential that he should now be destroyed (John 7:50–52). It was a policy speech of Caiaphas which suggested that it was better for one man to perish rather than that the whole nation should fall under the suspicion of Rome (John 11:47–50). And finally there was the need to get someone from among those who were nearest to Jesus to give them information as to the attitude of Jesus himself to the fast developing situation (Matt. 26:14–16). In the name of all that they held dear, the enemies of Jesus saw no way out of their difficulties except to destroy him. Jesus was destroyed by men's devotion to what was partly good, and only partly evil. Good alone has the power of achievement; the demonic power of evil is seen in its ability to take hold of what is in itself good, and to use it for evil purposes.

The way in which Jesus prepared for the conflict was first of all to get rid of all "passengers"—that is, all on whom he could not count to be faithful to the end. His teaching took on a quality of depth and difficulty which soon caused those who were merely interested to turn back and follow him no more. In fact, even the disciples began to waver. But one direct question from Jesus rallied them again: "Will you also go away?" he asked; and Peter replied for them all when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:66–68).

Jesus then took his disciples and went away quietly to far-off Phoenicia. There he was not known, and he hoped to be able to spend unhurried time with them. But he was soon discovered, and a woman of Phoenicia came to him for help. Jesus asked her, "Is it right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs, even if they be pet dogs?" The woman perhaps answered the kindly glance of Jesus' eye rather than his words, when she replied, "No, Master,

but the children themselves give of their bread to their pets." She got what she wanted, but Jesus was unable to have quiet in Phoenicia any more (see Matt. 15:21-28). So he hurried across the whole length of Galilee and came again to the eastern side of the Jordan to the land of Decapolis (Mark 7:31 ff.). But here, the man who had been set free from the legion of devils which troubled him had obeyed so well the command of Jesus to tell others all that God had done for him that, the moment it was known that Jesus was in Decapolis, crowds came to him. Jesus left at once, and this time went quietly to Galilee itself.

Here again he was soon discovered, and the waverers among the scribes and Pharisees came to him with a last request: "Why don't you give us a sign, so that we may know without any doubt whether you are the Christ or no?" The disciples too seem to have encouraged the making of this request. They were constantly puzzled by Jesus —by the sureness with which he spoke and worked, and yet the restraint which seemed to hold him back from taking advantage of his successes. Jesus answered the request for a sign with a blunt refusal. His works themselves were signs, if only they would read them. But to those who would not see, no sign could be given. Besides, why was not the sign which Jonah gave to the Ninevites enough for them? Jonah gave no sign except the message which he proclaimed: "Forty days and forty nights and this city will be destroyed" (see Jonah 3:4). And the Ninevites believed and repented. Could the Jews not see that the signs of judgment were all around them too? When the sky was red in the evening, they could tell that it would be fair weather; and when it was red in the morning, they could tell that it would be stormy. Why not then similarly read the signs of the times? To ask for a sign in spite of all this was to show that they were divided

in their own minds and were not willing to give their whole loyalty to Jesus. Only an adulterous people would ask for a sign to make certain for them the identity of their legitimate Lord (Matt. 16:1-12).

After this conversation Jesus did not linger in Galilee any more. He took his disciples and went north. On the way he warned them about the anxiety to see a sign, which was manifest in them also. He had noticed how interested they were in the request of the scribes and Pharisees. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" (Mark 8:15), he said to his disciples. You must learn to believe because you have come to know. Your love and loyalty should not be made dependent on your ability to understand. It may often happen that you do not understand the ways of God, but you can know him and love him and be loyal to him.

The town in the north to which Jesus and his disciples came was Caesarea Philippi, and it was here that Jesus finally led the disciples to face the one issue on which all depended. Did his disciples know him, know who he was? They may not have understood everything he said or did. They never would. But who did they think he was? Peter jumped over all the hurdles of their doubt in one grand leap. Who would ask the question about himself except the One who had the right to make that his question? "You are the Christ," he said, "the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). The living God—that was the God of their Scriptures; the God who called Abraham, the God who sent Moses, the God who chose David as king; and Jesus was his Christ, his anointed, his Son, the One to whom the Scriptures pointed, the One in whom the promise of the Scriptures was fulfilled.

From now on Jesus began to speak openly about the sufferings of the Christ. He had perceived that the Messiah and the Suffering Servant of the Scriptures were one.

It was through suffering that he would bring many sons to glory (see Heb. 2:10). But to the disciples this talk of suffering, so soon after the exultation attending Peter's confession, was completely confusing. They could not understand it. And Peter expressed their mind with his usual vigor when he rebuked his Master: "What you say cannot be, it does not make sense," was what he said. Jesus said to him, "Peter, the foundation stone should not become the stone of stumbling. As long as you see things only in their natural light, and talk as men talk, then you are an instrument of the devil himself. Suffering is the royal road of the Messiah and of his people" (see Matt. 16:13-23).

Peter and his friends were silenced, but they still did not understand. Soon, however, they were to have another experience. Jesus took them with him up on the mountain to pray. Nine of the disciples stayed farther down, while Peter, James, and John went with him to the top. There they saw a vision of his glory. Moses and Elijah were there speaking with Jesus about the decease which he must accomplish at Jerusalem. His suffering and death were a task to be accomplished, not an infliction to be endured. The disciples caught a glimmer of the truth that the glory of the Son is the glorious splendor of love poured out (Matt. 17:1-8).

There are three predictions which Jesus makes of his passion, and as the gospel records show, these reveal the way in which the situation was developing. The first prediction, made at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:21), indicates the probability of action by the Sanhedrin, the Council of the Jews. The second prediction, made on the way to Jerusalem (Luke 17:25, cf. John 11:8), speaks of the possibility of Jesus being secretly killed by his enemies. And the third prediction, made on the way to the Passover feast itself (Matt. 20:18-19; 26:2), points to

crucifixion by the Romans. The enemies of Jesus were at work all the time; and Jesus was not unaware of their plans.

The Bid for Jerusalem: Into the Jaws of Death

The gospel picture of Jesus as he turns his face toward Jerusalem is a striking one. Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration were enough to hold the faith of the disciples. Indeed, the disciples were now so sure about the triumph of Jesus that they had begun to quarrel among themselves as to how they would share the honors of his kingdom. But Jesus was walking on ahead, his face steadfastly set toward Jerusalem. How symbolic this picture is, and how sorrowfully true so often—Jesus on his way to the cross, and the Church behind him arguing about place and influence!

Peter seems to have been the chief object of jealousy in the quarrel among the disciples. He was so deeply upset that he asked Jesus how many times he should forgive, or whether at any stage he could declare an open breach and be done with it (Matt. 18:21-22). Later on James and John entered the picture by bringing to Jesus their mother, who asked him to grant special places to her sons in the coming kingdom. We know the answer of Jesus—I can only give them a share in what belongs to me, and that is the way of the cross. The kingdom belongs to my Father. He said to them, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” He said to them, “You will” (Matt. 20:20-23). It was perhaps at this time also that there happened the incident of the thirteenth man. It was bad enough having twelve people among whom to distribute the honors; to have a thirteenth added was worse. John said to Jesus, “We saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us.” Jesus replied,

“Do not forbid him; . . . For he that is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:38–40). Where the issue was loyalty to Jesus, the position was that he who was not for him was against him (Matt. 12:30). Where the issue was the work of the kingdom, the position was that he who was not against us was for us.

Jesus had not got beyond Galilee on his way to Jerusalem before the Pharisees and scribes came to him with the request that he pay his temple tax. Herod had built and completed the temple of Jerusalem, but every Jew had to pay a tax to wipe out the debt on it, and for its upkeep. Would Jesus pay? He had challenged them saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). What had he meant? Jesus immediately arranged for the tax to be paid, for he did not want to give his enemies the chance of accusing him of disloyalty to their faith (Matt. 17:24–27). He would himself choose the hour and the mode of the final conflict between them. The initiative would be his to the very end.

Jesus now entered Samaria. But, since he was going to Jerusalem, the Samaritan village in which they sought to rest for a night would not receive them. James and John were so indignant that they wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy the village. Jesus merely passed on (Luke 9:51–56).

He was on his way to Jerusalem and nothing would distract him. He must not dally in the way, or allow side issues to delay him; he just went straight ahead. The parables he tells his disciples on the way are also significant. They are all parables about preparedness. Early in his ministry in Galilee his parables were about the nature of the kingdom; then in the midst of the conflict he had told them the parables of harvest and the crisis of judgment; and now on the way to Jerusalem he was exhorting them to be ready for any emergency. The absent master

would come when he was least expected (Mark 13:34–37), and the servants who were diligent about their master's service would be approved rather than the servant who was only careful about his master's money (Matt. 25:14–30). The bridegroom may be delayed, and the virgins who had oil in their lamps but no extra oil in their bottles would be left behind (Matt. 25:1–13). Watchfulness, faithfulness, and preparedness were essential if one was to discharge the call of discipleship. Testing times were ahead.

Luke's Gospel makes the story of the healing of the ten lepers the final story of this journey of Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. Ten men were healed, but only a Samaritan came back to give God thanks . . . (Luke 17: 11–19).

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. It is small to begin with, but it will grow, and when it is grown the birds of the air will nest in its branches. The tree is for all the nations (Luke 13:18–19). The kingdom of heaven is like leaven. Once hid in the meal, it goes on doing its work until the whole is leavened (Luke 13:20–21). The kingdom of heaven is like a city set on a hill which cannot be hid (Matt. 5:14). The smallness of the seed, the silence of the leaven, the distance of the city, are no cause for depression or despair. The seed will grow; the leaven will continue to work; the city will remain.

Chapter 6

If Thou Hadst Known

A HINDU TEACHER in one of our schools in Ceylon came to me one day and said, "Pastor, I want to be a Christian. Will you baptize me?" She had just graduated from the university. She was the daughter of a doctor of medicine. I talked her decision out with her, and found that she had come under strong Christian influences in her high school and at college, both Christian institutions, and that she had been led to decide for Jesus as the result of the normal life and activities that obtain in Christian schools. I asked her whether she had spoken to her father about her decision and had received his permission to be baptized. She answered, "No." I then told her to write to him and tell him everything. A week later she came back and put into my hands the letter which her father had written her. He had written quite plainly that he forbade her to be baptized, and that if she still insisted on becoming a Christian, she should not and could not come home. It was a cruel choice for a young girl to make—her father and her home or Jesus Christ. She sat in my house weeping quietly for some time. Then I said to her, "Jesus made a promise to people like you. The promise was made

when he himself was on his way to Jerusalem to meet death. He promised that there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for his sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (Mark 10:29–30). Jesus depended on the church to fulfill this promise. He depended on people like me. You have come to me as the pastor of this place; let me offer you the welcome of my home whenever you may need it. We cannot take the place of your home and your father; but whatever we can do, we shall do. Go back to your school and think the whole thing over and come and tell me what you have decided.” Her answer came back through her tears: “I can decide now. I want to be baptized.” The baptism took place. When her school holidays came and the school hostel was closed, she came to us and stayed with us for some time, until she went to spend part of her holidays with a sister. There, it turned out that the man to whom her sister was married was an old friend of mine in the university. He was not a Christian but he understood the Christian position. In fact, when we were together at the university, he and I had gone to church together. He and his wife now provided a home for their sister. They also later effected a reconciliation with the father.

Many times my mind has gone back to this incident. It seemed to bring together the truth of many things. Here was a conversion that was due to the normal processes of Christian work, a conversion without any spectacular cause. Here was the demand that whoever did not hate father, mother, wife and children, and his own life could not be Christ’s disciple (Luke 14:26). Here was the willingness of the church to stand by its commitments.

And here was the provision which Jesus himself had made for this child who had chosen him, by bringing a man years earlier into contact with Christian friends who influenced him, a man who now had a home to which she could go and be welcome.

We have followed Jesus to the gates of Jerusalem. We are about to enter with him into the story of those final months in which he accomplished his death. We shall understand these events best by remembering that from them springs the claim which Jesus has over every person. He says, "Follow me," and to those who follow, he offers a cross; but it is already the cross which has been made light by his obedience to his Father, and has become the gateway to life through the victory he won over it.

Rejected: The Beginning of the End

The Gospels tell us that Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, "How often would I . . . and you would not!" (Matt. 23:37). The first three Gospels, however, record only one visit of Jesus to Jerusalem, the last one. It is in John's Gospel that we get the full record of the attempts that Jesus made to win Jerusalem. There was first of all his visit at the opening of his ministry when he cleared the temple market. Then there was his visit a year after that when he cured the man who had lain so long at the pool of Bethzatha; as a result of this miracle, a great controversy had started. And now here was his third visit during the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was the feast of ingathering at the end of the year's work on the land, so that there was great appropriateness in the invitation which Jesus announced on the great day of the feast when he said, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37). But the invitation was hardly heeded. The chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. It is true that the officers came back

without fulfilling their commission and saying, "No man ever spoke like this man!" (John 7:46); but Jesus himself did not receive any general response. So he departed from their midst and went across the Jordan to Perea. He was in Perea for about three months until the Feast of Dedication, when he came to Jerusalem again. This time he was involved in another bitter controversy, which arose as a result of his healing a man who was blind from his birth. The words of Jesus at the climax of that controversy, during which they even tried to stone him, are significant. He said to the man who was healed, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (John 9:39-41).

This whole period of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, which is marked by persistent conflict with the leaders of his people, is also marked by the most forthright teaching which Jesus gave about himself:

I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12)

When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he. (John 8:28)

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God. (John 8:42)

Before Abraham was, I am. (John 8:58)

These sayings of Jesus, however, were not understood; and so the Jews came to him in one last attempt to make sure of what he was trying to say. They said to him,

“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe . . . because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10: 24–30). That was the end. He had made his final assertion, and they made their final rejection. A second time they took up stones to stone him; but he went away from their midst, and was in Perea until he came to Jerusalem for the last time for the Passover.

The ministry of Jesus in Perea, which lasted from the Feast of Tabernacles to the Feast of Dedication, and then from the Feast of Dedication to the Feast of the Passover, is recorded for us primarily in the Gospel according to Luke. It is natural that this should be so, for it is Luke who is interested in the Gentiles and gives us the record of those events which underlie the gospel as Paul preached it, a gospel meant for Jews and Gentiles without distinction. The Perea ministry of Jesus was a ministry to all people. From Galilee he had sent out his twelve disciples to the lost house of Israel; from Perea he sent out seventy disciples to all the nations (Luke 10:1–17). (It was a common Jewish idea that Israel consisted of twelve tribes, and the world consisted of seventy nations.)

Also to the Perea ministry belong those parables of Jesus which deal with the cost of discipleship:

The story of the man who began to build a tower but could not finish it, and the story of the king who started a war that he could not win (Luke 14:28–32)

Why enter upon a life of obedience to God if one

is not prepared to go as far as the cross? Why enter upon a life of rebellion against God when one knows that ultimately such rebellion can never be victorious?

Also the parables about saving the lost:

The stories of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son (Luke 15:4-32)

The whole must be restored to that wholeness which is lost when one part or one member has gone astray. The coin must be put back on the chain; the lost sheep must be brought back to the fold; the lost son must return to the home.

And thirdly, the parables about the right attitude to worldly wealth:

The stories of the steward who was an intelligent rogue, and of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:1-9; 19-31)

This life is meant to serve the ends of another life. The good things of this life cannot finally satisfy. They are not even evidence of God's blessing or of God's condemnation.

Clearly the intention of Jesus was to stay on in Perea up to the time of the Passover. The Jews had sought to stone him, but his end would not take the form of that kind of death at the hands of a mob, or of secret assassination. His people as a whole must make their decision about him, and Jesus had decided to face them with that moment of decision. So he waited in Perea. But suddenly news came that his friend Lazarus was ill. He did not go. Then the news came that Lazarus was dead. He must go. Here was a special way in which the glory of God must be made manifest. His disciples were taken aback by his de-

cision to go to Bethany. But they saw that his mind was made up and that nothing would stop his going. Thomas said to the rest, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Jesus came to Bethany. We know the sequel. Lazarus was raised to life again (John 11:1-44).

Immediately there was a new enthusiasm in the crowd for Jesus; but Jesus knew how fickle that crowd was. Besides, this event of the raising of Lazarus made it very clear to the leaders of the Jews that they must act quickly. They too could not depend on the crowd. They must make the crowd act according to their will, before Jesus had time to press home his advantage, and secure a permanent and unshakable loyalty.

Jesus did not return to Perea by the way he had come. He slipped away north to the little village of Ephraim, and when everything was quiet went back again beyond Jordan. There he remained until his final journey to Jerusalem.

Soon the time of the Passover was near. Then Jesus collected his disciples and set out on his journey. His mind and soul were full of the tragedy that lay ahead of him. He was going to Jerusalem to accomplish his death. On the way three men came to him and offered to follow him. The first was anxious to share in the great happenings that were evidently to take place in Jerusalem. Jesus said to him, "I do not want anybody to do great deeds on my behalf. All I want now is quiet and restful companionship and friendship, for the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head. Early in the morning the foxes go to their holes to rest, but the Son of man is awake. Late in the evening the birds go to their nests to rest, but the Son of man is still awake." The would-be disciple turned away from Jesus. He had offered to join in an adventure. He had no time or taste for quiet friendship.

Another came up and said, "I will go with you, but not

now. I have duties at home to fulfill. I have an old father whom I must look after till his death." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury the dead. There are always enough people to attend to the business of this world; follow me." But the man would not.

Jesus turned to a third man, who seemed to be interested in the conversation, and said to him, "Will you follow?" The man answered, "Yes—but I must run home first and say good-by." Jesus said to him, "I cannot wait here for you until you go home and say good-by. For no man puts his hand to the plough and turns back, not even to wait for a would-be disciple" (see Luke 9:57–62).

Jesus must hasten on, for the hour had come. But at this stage it was still his purpose to go quietly; his enemies must not know what his movements were. The gospel writers give us two major incidents as having happened on the last part of this journey, at Jericho before Jesus finally arrived at Bethany, which was to be his home during this last visit of his to Jerusalem. The first incident is that of the blind Bartimaeus. Hearing a multitude going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." And he cried, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18:36–38). They ordered him to keep quiet, but he shouted all the more until Jesus called him and healed him. Some are blind because they refuse to see; but there are still some blind men who are willing to receive the gift of sight from Jesus Christ.

The second incident is that of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10); this gave Jesus an opportunity again to demonstrate what his mission involved. His mission meant the bringing of salvation, the experience of security and peace to all. God's salvation is meant for all men; and to all men must be restored the gifts of God which they have lost.

So the story of the public ministry of Jesus ends. There is only one week more, and that is the week of the final tragedy and triumph. So we end this story of his public ministry with his words addressed to Zacchaeus: "Make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

Chapter 7

But He Is Dead

WE READ THE STORY of the cross and all that led up to it from the vantage point of the resurrection of Christ. We know that he is risen. But those who followed him during that last week of tragedy in Jerusalem did not know. His friends and disciples followed hardly knowing what to expect. And their mood at the end of it all is well expressed in those words of the disciples on their way to Emmaus when they said, "We thought that he was to be the Savior of Israel, but he is dead" (see Luke 24:21).

Our attempt in this narrative must be simply to follow the incidents of this last week as they happened, and try to see them with the eyes of his first disciples. Indeed, the incidents so crowd upon one another and each so tells its own story that little comment on them is necessary. We shall merely recount them, remembering that, as we follow Jesus here, we are ourselves following him to his cross and to our own.

The Last Week: On the Threshold of Tragedy

The Jewish day is from sunset to sunset, and it is according to this reckoning that the events of each day are here arranged.

SUNDAY. 1. Jesus has his evening meal in the home of the family at Bethany. It is at this meal, when Jesus speaks openly about his death, that Judas finally resolves to precipitate the issue by betraying him (Matt. 26:6-16; John 12:1-8).

2. In the early morning Jesus leaves for Jerusalem. He approached Jerusalem riding on an ass. It is a quiet and thoughtful procession. That Jesus comes riding on an ass raises questions that for long have remained unasked. Is Jesus really the long-expected King? If so, what kind of a kingdom is it that he comes to bring? But, as Jesus nears Jerusalem, a crowd of Galileans who are in Jerusalem hear about his coming and go out to meet him. They escort him to Jerusalem in triumphal procession (Luke 19:28-40; John 12:13).

3. As Jesus turns the bend on the road and sees Jerusalem, he dismounts. He looks at the city and weeps. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . . . How often would I . . . and you would not! Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!" (Matt. 23:37; Luke 19:42).

4. Jesus enters Jerusalem and goes into the temple. He looks round about upon everything. He withdraws for the night to Bethany (Mark 11:11).

And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee." The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him." (Matt. 21:10-11; John 12:19)

MONDAY. 1. Jesus rests for the night at Bethany, and leaves in the morning again for Jerusalem. On the way, being hungry, he seeks fruit from a fig tree which, in that it has leaves, bears the promise of fruit, since on the fig

tree the fruit begins to form before the leaves appear. But it has none. Indeed, no one would have expected fruit from it (for it was not the season for figs) if it had not deceived people by having leaves.

What an appropriate symbol it was of Jerusalem—a city with every appearance of piety but without the reality of it—and how significant was the word of Jesus: “May no one ever eat fruit from you again” (Mark 11: 12–14). Only forty years were to pass before Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by the Romans.

2. On entering Jerusalem, Jesus goes into the temple. The children, seeing him, take up the cry of the previous day—“Hosanna to the Son of David!” The chief priests and scribes seek to prevent the children from acclaiming Jesus, but Jesus replies, “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast brought perfect praise” (Matt. 21: 14–16).

3. Many that are sick come to Jesus and are healed. Jesus teaches the people. He points out to them the significance of the temple of Jerusalem, as intended to be the house of prayer for all nations, whereas it has now become a den of thieves. He perhaps reminds them of that first act of his in the temple, when he cleaned out the market there, and perhaps as he speaks the buyers and sellers themselves creep away in fear.*

4. Jesus returns in the evening to Bethany (Matt. 21:17).

The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people sought to destroy him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people hung upon his words. (Luke 19:47–48)

* The view taken in this book is that Jesus cleansed the temple only once, and that this took place, as recorded in John’s Gospel, at the beginning of his ministry.

TUESDAY MORNING. 1. Jesus spends this night also at Bethany, and in the morning goes again to Jerusalem. His enemies are waiting for him in the temple court. They have prepared three questions with which to entrap him:

An ecclesiastical question—By what authority?—an answer to which they hope will get Jesus into difficulty with the Jewish authorities (Matt. 21:23–27).

A political question—Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?—an answer to which they hope will get Jesus into difficulty with the Roman authorities (Matt. 22: 15–22).

A theological question—How shall it be in the resurrection?—an answer to which they hope will discredit Jesus in the eyes of the common people (Matt. 22: 23–33).

Jesus confounds them all.

2. A bystander questions Jesus about the great commandment, and receives from Jesus the double answer about love to God and love to our neighbor. Jesus then turns the tables by asking the crowd a question about the Messiah, whose dignity is higher than that of David (Matt. 22:34–46).

3. Jesus tells them three parables to explain how and why God will set aside his first choice of Israel:

The son that said “I will” has not obeyed, while it is the son who said “I will not” who has obeyed (Matt. 21:28–32); if the Jews will not hear, their call can be transferred to the Gentiles.

The husbandmen have sought to make their own what always belonged to their Lord. Therefore it is now taken away (Matt. 21:33–43).

It is true that all are called to the wedding, but none can join the wedding feast who do not have the wedding garment (Matt. 22:1-14).

4. Jesus turns to the scribes and Pharisees and tells them plainly that God has rejected them. Their religion is show and sham, cleverly worked-out compromise and superficial obedience. They are true sons of their fathers who slew the prophets.

5. Jesus is sitting down opposite the treasury. He praises the widow who put in two mites, all that she had.

It was the Master's last word spoken in the temple. He now leaves the city, never again to teach in its temple or in its streets.

For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living. (Mark 12:44)

TUESDAY EVENING. Jesus crosses the brook Kidron and goes to the Mount of Olives. He sits there with his disciples and tells them about the things that must come to pass (Matt. 24; Mark 13):

He speaks to them about the coming of false Messiahs and the destruction of Jerusalem.

He warns them about the breaking down of moral standards and primary loyalties under the stress of times of tribulation.

He tells them to be prepared for persecution which will certainly come.

He gives them the signs that can always be discerned, when a day of the Son of man is imminent.

He teaches them that in the end there will be the final harvesting of sin, the end of history, and the dawn of the New Age.

And when that comes to pass, everything of value will be gathered in. No deed, however small, which ministers to the advancement of God's purpose will be forgotten. The disciples are to go on God's mission; and when anyone in any way helps even the least of them, his brethren, they do it to him (Matt. 25:31-46).

But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. (Luke 21:34-35)

WEDNESDAY. 1. Jesus spends the evening quietly at Bethany. He will not go to Jerusalem again to teach or preach.

2. In the morning a group of people seek him out at Bethany. These are Jewish proselytes or inquirers from the Greek-speaking towns, perhaps Alexandria, who have come to Jerusalem for the feast. They are impressed by Jesus, and they now come to him in private to request him to go with them. Why must he stay in Jerusalem and die?

Jesus comes out to meet them. He has his answer ready. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. If anyone serves me, he must follow me."

3. But the request of these Greeks does force into the foreground again the question, Must this be? "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name."

Jesus: "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

People: “We have heard from the law that the Christ remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?”

Jesus: “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

When Jesus had said this, he departed and hid himself from them. (John 12:20–36)

THURSDAY. 1. According to Matthew and Mark, it is on the evening with which Thursday begins that Jesus is entertained at dinner in the house of Simon. As we have already seen, the Fourth Gospel indicates a different date for this event, and places this dinner at the beginning of the week (John 12:1; cf. Mark 14:1). But it is not improbable that during this evening there was a conversation concerning what had taken place a few days earlier, and that in this conversation Jesus referred again to his impending death: “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

2. That night Judas has no rest. And in the morning he goes to the chief priests and makes his bargain with them. Surely what Judas betrayed was not merely the place of retreat of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, but also the fact that Jesus would not resist arrest and death. The enemies of Jesus are obviously afraid that he will use his miraculous powers against them.

3. The Sanhedrin meets, and the decision is taken to kill Jesus. But it is not improbable that there were those in the Sanhedrin who were sympathetic to Jesus—Nicodemus, for instance; for when Jesus is arrested Caiaphas

is unable to do without Jewish legal formalities. There must have been those who insisted on a fair trial with witnesses to prove the charges against him.

4. Jesus sends two of his disciples to the city to prepare what is to be his last meal with them. The house in which this supper is arranged is in all probability the home of John Mark, a nephew of Peter.

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (John 13:1)

Friday: The Tragic Climax

IN THE UPPER ROOM. 1. As Thursday draws to a close, Jesus set out with his disciples for Jerusalem. He is going to establish his kingdom. But the disciples understand so little the nature of that kingdom that even at this last moment they quarrel about first places.

2. They reach Jerusalem soon after sunset, and go to the guestchamber where the farewell meal has been prepared. The Fourth Gospel makes it clear that this meal was not the Passover meal (John 13:1). The Passover lamb was slain on the Friday morning at the same hour as that at which Jesus was crucified. The saying of Paul, "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (I Cor. 5:7) also reflects this fact.

3. The disciples enter the upper room without washing each other's feet, as custom and courtesy demand. They are still concerned as to who is the greatest among them, and none of them is willing to play the part of a servant. Jesus notices, but says nothing. The meal follows; the New Covenant is instituted in the breaking of the Bread and the sharing of the Cup; and then the basic virtue and attitude of this New Society is demonstrated by Jesus

himself. He washes the disciples' feet, and thus himself plays the part of the servant to his brethren.

4. Jesus makes his last appeal to Judas, and then gives him a chance to go without being suspected by the rest. Jesus bids good-by to his faithful disciples. Peter desires to go with him: Jesus warns him that his loyalty will soon be tested.

5. The gift of peace, the promise of the Spirit, the hymn of praise—and this farewell meal is over.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

IN THE GARDEN. 1. Jesus leaves the upper room with his disciples, and crosses the Kidron valley into the Garden of Gethsemane. On the way, he explains to them the rite of bread and wine which he has just instituted: "Abide in me, and I in you. Continue in my love. Love one another."

2. He explains the meaning of, and the necessity for, his going away. He prays for them and with them.

3. When he arrives at the garden, he takes Peter, James, and John with him, leaving the others near the entrance. Further on, he leaves these three disciples also, and goes ahead alone to pray, with the request that they keep awake and pray for him. But they slept because they were sad.

Christ's agony in Gethsemane is one of the most difficult things to understand, if we think merely that Jesus was a man who lived an exemplary life and died as a martyr. His disciples after him met martyrdom with less conflict of spirit and a more serene peace. Why was Jesus so troubled? Surely we have here an indication of the fact that Jesus had a sense that he himself was carrying the guilt of the sin which caused his death.

4. Judas comes to Jesus with the temple guard to effect his arrest. Peter slashes out, perhaps at Judas, and cuts off the ear of a servant of the high priest. Jesus rebukes Peter, and heals the servant's ear. He saves his disciples from being arrested. They run away. He is arrested and taken to the palace of the high priest.

5. Peter enters with the rest. His Galilean speech betrays him. He denies knowledge of his Master. Jesus looks at him. He goes out and weeps bitterly.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren. (Luke 22:31-32)

IN THE HIGH PRIEST'S PALACE. 1. Jesus is taken first to Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest, and questioned by him. Jesus tells him that it is not necessary to question him directly, since he had always spoken and acted in public. Correct legal procedure demanded the examination of witnesses. Jesus is struck by the bystanders.

2. Jesus is taken to Caiaphas, who calls witnesses, and proceeds to conduct the trial according to the legal procedure laid down.

It is interesting to note this aspect of legality in the arrest and trial of Jesus, when so much of it was illegal. It was illegal for the temple guard to effect the arrest at the command of the high priest. The witnesses themselves should produce the accused. It was illegal to try a capital charge by night. It was illegal, when the testimony of the witnesses had broken down, for the judge to cross-examine the prisoner directly. And yet the legal procedure followed at the trial shows that Caiaphas was not all-powerful to work his will that night.

3. The witnesses did not agree. Caiaphas addresses

Jesus directly. "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" "I am." It was the first plain declaration in public of his Messiahship.

Jesus is found guilty and condemned to death.

4. Jesus is struck, spat upon, and buffeted.

I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven. (Mark 14:62)

IN THE PROCONSUL'S COURT. 1. Some three hours seem to have elapsed between the departure of Judas from the upper room to the house of the high priest and the actual arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane. This delay may well have been due to the fact that Caiaphas had to make arrangements with Pilate beforehand. What these arrangements were, we shall see as the story develops.

Pilate leaves his apartments early to receive the prisoner. Pilate's wife finds him already gone when she awakes. She sends word to him not to fulfill his promise to Caiaphas, which must have been merely to ratify formally the sentence of Caiaphas on Jesus.

Pilate comes out of the court, without objection, to receive the accused and his accusers. The Jews could not go in to the court, for there would have been no time later to purify themselves before the feast.

When, in response to his wife's note, Pilate shows that he intends to re-try the prisoner, Caiaphas shows his resentment: "If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over."

2. The trial before Pilate is long and arduous. Pilate seeks to shift responsibility to the high priest or Herod. At last he yields, and in response to the cry, "We have no king but Caesar," he hands Jesus over to be crucified. It

is the irony of history that the people whose watchword was "We have no king but God" deny this fundamental principle of their national and religious life in order to have Jesus crucified.

You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin. (John 19:11)

THE WAY OF THE CROSS. 1. Jesus has been scourged and crowned with thorns. They have robed him in purple and mocked him as king. Now they put on him his own garments and lead him out to be crucified.

2. He goes bearing his own cross, but it is too heavy for his lacerated back to bear. They meet an African—Simon of Cyrene—and compel him to carry the cross of Jesus. Two robbers, who are to be crucified with him, follow, each carrying his own cross.

3. A great crowd follows, and many women weep. Jesus turns to them saying: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23: 25-31).

4. The procession passes out of the city gate to the hill beyond, and when they reach Golgotha—the place of the skull—they make ready to crucify Jesus.

The cross is placed on the ground, and Jesus is stretched upon it. They offer him wine mixed with myrrh to numb his senses; but he refuses to drink it. As the nails are driven into his flesh, he prays, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

5. The cross is now raised upright and placed in its socket. Jesus is crucified.

He saved others; he cannot save himself. (Mark 15:31)

CALVARY. 9 A.M. Jesus is crucified. He speaks seven words from the cross:

1. *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*
His thought for the Roman soldiers.
2. *Today you will be with me in Paradise.*
His thought for his repentant fellow sufferer.
3. *Woman, behold your son! . . . Behold your mother!*
His thought for his mother.

12 NOON. Jesus endures the darkness of forsakenness from 12 noon to 3 P.M.

4. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*
Jesus strikes bottom in paying the price of sin.
5. *I thirst.*
Jesus—Man.
6. *It is finished.*
Jesus—Savior!

3 P.M.

7. *Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!*
Jesus—Son!

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was a son of God!" (Mark 15:38-39)

THE GARDEN TOMB. 1. In the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden and in the garden a new sepulchre.

Joseph of Arimathea, one of the councilors, comes forward to take charge of the body of Jesus. He obtains

permission from Pilate. Nicodemus helps him. They hurriedly embalm the body with a mixture of myrrh and aloes, wrap it in a linen cloth, and lay it in the newly hewn tomb.

2. The high priest and the others go to Pilate with a request that the tomb be guarded. They do so because in all the evidence that night in the palace of Caiaphas the only bit of clear testimony was to this word of Jesus: "This man said, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" What Caiaphas and the others understand by this we cannot say, but they are certainly anxious.

3. Pilate asks them to see to the matter themselves, and on that sabbath morning (the next day after his burial) they go and seal the tomb and set a guard. And so they go home satisfied that their work is done. Jesus will trouble them no more. But . . .

And ever since that day this "But" has stared mankind in the face—the "But" of God's triumphant possibility in spite of human sin, the "But" of God's deed of grace in reply to man's sinful action.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus . . . you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up. (Acts 2:22-24)

Chapter 8

Whom God Raised Up

THE GOSPEL STORY opens with the declaration, "They shall call his name Immanuel . . . God with us." It ends with the affirmation, "Jesus Christ is risen from the dead." To us, who so naively think of death as simply death of the physical body, and therefore think of the soul as automatically continuing to exist beyond death, the temptation is great to understand the story of the resurrection in terms of the natural immortality of Jesus. But what the Gospels assert is not simply that Jesus is alive, but that Jesus is here, back again among men. He is still Immanuel, God with us. Most of those who planned the crucifixion of Jesus believed in the continuance of life after death. All they were concerned about was to get rid of Jesus *from their midst*. As long as he was on earth, he would be a nuisance. And it was just here that they lost—though they had killed him, Jesus was still in their midst.

There are some today who seek to restate the fact of the resurrection in terms that would fit in with our modern knowledge. They find that the story of the resurrection is told in words and ways of thinking which do not

correspond to our normal ways of thinking. They forget that any attempt to restate the fact of the resurrection in this way must necessarily turn that fact into a natural event, that is, an event which could happen again and again in nature. But that is not at all what happened: only Jesus has risen; his resurrection is not something that has ever been repeated. We shall rise again, but only through him, and because he has risen once for all. So, since we are speaking about an event that has happened only once, it is better to speak about it in the terms in which the Bible announces it, rather than to attempt to fit it into the terms in which we speak of ordinary events.

Christianity became a religion separate from Judaism because of this declaration: "Jesus Christ is risen from the dead"; and a Christian is one who has met this risen Lord and has accepted him as Lord and Savior of his life. Christian discipleship consists in following a living Lord as he goes about fulfilling his ministry, and sharing with him in that ministry.

Let us now turn to the gospel story and try to recapture the joy and wonder of that Easter morning.

Easter: Beyond Tragedy

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had taken down the body of Jesus, wrapped it in its graveclothes, put one hundred pounds of spices within their folds, laid the body inside the tomb, and rolled the stone against the door of the sepulchre. The stone was sealed (John 19:38-42; Matt. 27:66). At sunset on Saturday the sabbath was over, but women could not go out in the darkness of the night. Daybreak on Sunday morning would give them their first opportunity to go to the tomb. So the women who loved Jesus gathered together and, with spices to anoint his body, hurried to the tomb in the dim light of the early dawn, to do for him what could not be done in

a hurried burial. Who will roll away the stone? It is not impossible to imagine Mary of Magdala saying, "We shall find a way. I know these men." But when they got to the tomb, they found the stone rolled away. The women peep in, and angels tell them, "He has risen, he is not here. . . . go, tell his disciples and Peter" (Mark 16:1-8).

Mary is the first to rush away to bring the news to the disciples. Peter and John run to the tomb as soon as they receive Mary's message. Mary follows them. John gets there first, and stands outside looking through the opening. Peter arrives and goes right in. John enters with him, and they find the graveclothes just as they were—the cloth covering the head in its place, the cloth covering the body in its place, and the spices still within the folds. No one has disturbed the cloth; no one could have stolen the body without some of those spices falling on the ground. The truth was obvious—Jesus was not there (John 20:1-10).

Peter and John return to tell their story. But Mary sits outside the tomb weeping. Jesus comes to her and reveals himself to her by the tone in which he calls her. "Mary," he says, and Mary knows him, for no one else had ever addressed her in exactly that voice. "Do not hold me," he says, "I do not belong any more to you in the flesh. I go to my Father and your Father. I am now Immanuel for everyone" (see John 20:11-18).

Soon after, Jesus appears to the other women also who had come to the tomb, and they bring the news to the disciples that they have seen him (Matt. 28:8-10).

By this time it is long past midday, and two of the disciples set out on their way to their home at Emmaus. They meet with Jesus on the way, but know him not. Jesus explains to them how the prophets had taught that the Christ must suffer and enter into his glory. "And be-

ginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Finally he reveals himself to them in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:13-35).

That same evening Jesus meets Peter (Luke 24:34). The women had delivered their message—that the angels had said to them, "Go and tell his disciples and Peter." We can imagine Peter going out into that garden, perhaps continuing to sit there after his first visit to the tomb, wondering, wondering, wondering. He had denied his Lord. Would Jesus come to meet him, and if he did, what would Jesus say? Jesus and Peter meet, but what happened at that meeting we do not know. In any case, Peter returned to his brethren, a man the sunshine of whose soul had been washed by rain. When the disciples from Emmaus returned, they said, "We have seen him." The disciples replied, "Yes, he is risen and he has appeared to Simon." While they are still talking, Jesus comes into their midst. "Peace," he says, and there was peace. But Thomas was not there when this happened. We know Thomas, and how, when Jesus left Perea to go to Bethany after the death of Lazarus, he said, "Let us also go and die with him." Thomas was a thinker who knew the implications of believing certain things, the implications of certain things being true. The disciples say to Thomas, "Jesus has risen and we have met him." Thomas refuses to believe. Too much was true if that was true.

We pass quickly from this day to that day when Jesus appeared to Thomas also. But the Gospels tell us that there was a gap of seven days of agony for Thomas. Had he doubted too much? Would he see Jesus? But Jesus appeared again on the next Sunday after Easter, the disciples being gathered together. "Come here, Thomas," he said, "put your finger into my wounds." Thomas fell

down before him and confessed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:19-29).

Pentecost and Beyond

John's Gospel leads up to the words, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The first disciples saw and believed. We, their children, have not seen, but still believe. But that which was given to them is given to us also, to meet Jesus, not indeed in the flesh but yet in the body, person to person. And he gives us the same commission that he gave to those disciples when he met them at the last: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (see Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:20). The gospel story, however, does not end here; for, as Matthew's Gospel makes so clear, the commission of Jesus to his Church is based on his lordship (Matt. 28:18); and, therefore, there is the story of that lordship to tell.

He "was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." At the beginning of the gospel story the devil offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world (Matt. 4:8-9). That offer was rejected. At the close of the gospel story Jesus is declared to be Lord. "He emptied himself, he humbled himself. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (see Phil. 2:7-11). So that, to use the words of Luke: the gospel story is the story of the things which Jesus began to do, to

be followed by the story of the things which he is still doing (Acts 1:1). Hence it is that the New Testament narrative does not end at the point of the resurrection of Christ, but continues to spell out the significance and consequence of that resurrection in a bewildering variety of ways.

There is first of all the event of Pentecost, when all God had done through Jesus the Christ is made the message of a community, the foundation of its life and the hope of its calling. God, the Holy Spirit, by whose power Jesus was raised from the dead, comes to indwell and energize the body of the risen Christ which is the church. And the church goes out to fulfill its ministry of proclamation, teaching, reconciliation, and service: in Jerusalem—at home; in Judea—in the neighborhood; in Samaria—where at first there is no welcome; and unto the uttermost parts of the world. The story of the Acts of the Apostles follows this order of narrative.

It is essential for a true understanding of the New Testament description of the church and its ministry to realize that what is described is not the activity of those who were seeking to work *for* Jesus, but the activity of those who were seeking to work *with* him. Evangelism is the function of the Messiah himself. It is he who will draw; it is he who will seek and find. The great commission, as the church seeks to fulfill it, is dependent on a “therefore.” “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go *therefore* and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:18-19). The authority for what the church does resides in what the Lord himself is doing. He is the ascended Lord, exercising authority at the right hand of the Father. He rules. He also prays, making intercession for us, since he who rules, rules in order to save. And as he prays, so also he works. We can understand the church’s fulfillment of its task only if we realize that this

fulfillment is simply the outward expression of the ministry which the risen Jesus himself is carrying on all the time.

The church proclaims its message; but the act of proclaiming is part of this message. The church teaches its doctrine and morals; but the church's own obedience is part of this teaching. The church effects reconciliation between man and man, group and group; but this ministry of reconciliation flows from the church's own life of fellowship in Christ. The church serves the world in its need; but the church's service arises from the fact that it has been constituted servant. In other words, the continuing work of Jesus Christ is what makes the church what it is; so that what the church does is the inevitable expression of its own being.

In the Epistles we have a human picture of concrete situations, of particular people, and of specific problems; by all this we are helped to understand the meaning, relevance, and significance of the church's fourfold task, which is our task too—to proclaim, to teach, to reconcile, and to serve. And then!

First the kingdom must be announced and then the end will come (Matt. 24:14). The Father's kingdom for which Jesus taught us to pray will be established (1 Cor. 15:24). The cross of Christ will have effected the victory, and he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied (Isa. 53:11). So that there is a fulfillment toward which all things move and in terms of which the task of the church finds meaning. The rule of the Christ will be established because it has been established already; and the method of that rule now is the means by which it will be established in the future. The Christ still rules by the method of the cross. The church is engaged in winning glad acceptance of that rule, and when all who contest that rule have been subdued, there shall be that

kingdom in which the Father is all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). The kingdom of glory is the goal of the kingdom of the cross.

In the last book of the New Testament this rule of the Christ by the method of the cross is the vital theme. That is the good news which the Book of Revelation announces. God is king, there is a throne in heaven, and the place of power is occupied by the Lamb (Rev. 5:6).

To one bound by earthly sight alone the forces of the world seem determinative of the final outcome of history; but he who has eyes to see and ears to hear can discern in the assurance of the heavenly hosts, as they sing their songs of praise, the certainty of the triumph of the purposes of God.

But the throne in heaven is a throne within a temple and not within a palace; a temple in which not only the songs of praise are heard but also where the incense of prayer is raised. There the heavenly priesthood makes intercession with the saints for the world (Rev. 5:8), and there the Lamb of God wields sway as an abiding sacrifice for his people (Rev. 5:12). The rule of the universe is in the hands of creative power and redemptive love.

Victory does not consist in the achievement of power but in being found worthy to wield it. To the Son belongs all authority, for he hath overcome (Rev. 5:9). There is therefore no reason for weeping, for though the church is beset with trials, he who began his good work will also finish it. He who has redeemed his people will perfect his redemption. He who has written their names in the book of life will open that book, and their sonship will be revealed.

Thus the story moves to its climax, and the New Testament concludes with a vision of that end when peace shall have been established and the strife of earth shall be given its meaning in the joy of heaven.

*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who
was and is and is to come! To him who sits upon the
throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and
glory and might for ever and ever! Amen.*

*Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving
and honor and power and might be to our God for
ever and ever! Amen.*